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ILLINOIS

Cave-In-Rock

STATE PARK

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CONSERVATION

THE PARK

Cave-In-Rock State Park is a narrow strip of land bordering the Ohio River for nearly a mile. In Hardin County, the 150-acre park is about one-half mile northeast of the village Cave in Rock off Route 1.

The park, acquired by the State of Illinois in 1929, is well-wooded with most of the trees native to the area. The 60-foot-high hills and rugged bluffs edging the park command a long and scenic view of the Ohio River.

THE CAVE

The most striking feature of the park is the large cave which give the park its name. On the face of the bluff, half-way between the summit and the normal line, a large arched opening about 55 feet wide extends into the gray limestone bluff which was at one time partially hidden by shrubbery and small trees. When the river is at pool stage, the mouth of the cave is approximately 30 feet from the edge of the river, but in the spring when the water is high, the cave may be entered by boat.

Cave-In-Rock has the appearance of a large arched crypt, embedded in solid rock with sphynx-like silence. The cavern extends back horizontally about 160 feet with an almost uniform width of 40 feet. The floor gradually inclines upward toward the back, where it comes within a few feet of the arched ceiling. At this end, there is a hole to an old sinkhole in the surface above. This has been reinforced by a rock wall which allows park visitors to peer down into the cave from above.

HISTORICAL LEGENDS

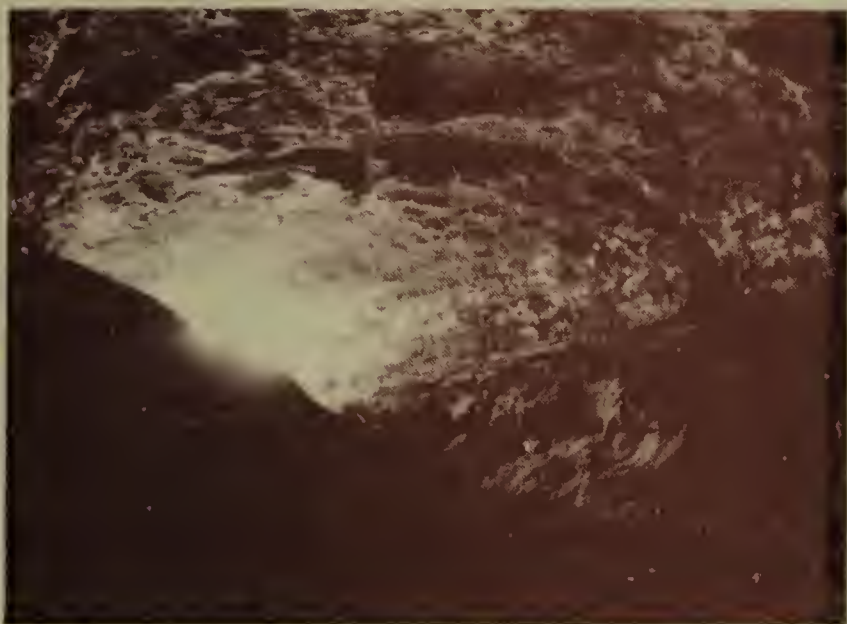
French Records: The earliest written record of the cave found is that of M. de Lery, a Frenchman who visited it in 1729. He called Caverne dans Le Roc (Cave in the Rock) and many other later travelers mentioned the cave in their diaries and journals. The cave was first shown on a map published by Charlevoix's "History of New France" in 1744, taken from Lery's data.

Outlaws: For many years after its discovery, Cave-In-Rock remained a natural curiosity visited by white men at rare intervals. But sometime after the Revolutionary War it allegedly became the headquarters of outlaw gangs which preyed on the travelers of the Ohio River. Among the early robbers was Samuel Mason, once an officer in George Washington's army, who converted the cave into a tavern in 1797, which he named "Cave-Inn-Rock." The tavern, though, was merely a screen for the outlawry of Mason and his confederates.

The river pirates used many tricks to lure travelers to the cave. Usually, some of Mason's men would join the travelers miles upstream and offer to help them. When the boats got near the cave, the pirates would wreck them or bring them to the cave where the travelers would be robbed. Few of these victims were fortunate enough to live to tell their tales.

Most notorious of robbers who reportedly occupied Cave-In-Rock after Mason in the early 1800's were two brothers, Big Harpe and Little Harpe. Fugitives from Kentucky for their perverted killings there, the brothers made the cave their new headquarters for crimes ranging from thievery to murder. Eventually both men were killed. After their deaths, the cave sheltered a gang of counterfeiters who operated there until 1831. For a short time afterward other outlaws frequented the cave, but by 1834 most of the vicious river pirates had either been killed or else discouraged in their activities.

After relative safety was restored, the cave often served as a shelter for pioneers on their way to the Illinois Country or the Great Plains. It was a famous landmark and was shown on most of the early maps.



Quotation: An Illinois historian, the late John W. Allen, in his book *"It Happened in Southern Illinois"* probably best summed up Cave-In-Rock by these quotations from that book: "It would be difficult to find another five-acre plot in the midwest, or, so far as that goes, in America where a more varied or plentiful stock of stories, legends, crimes, and horror accounts are attached. Nor would it be easy to find another storied place where the natural beauty is less changed. Today only the natural beauty of the historic spot remains, clothed in mystery. In the hollow silence of the cave that echoes the peaceful cooing of doves, a visitor can let a vivid imagination run riot. He can dream little that will be beyond what actually happened."



FACILITIES

Picnicking — Picnic areas are sprinkled throughout the park in shaded areas, with three playground areas nearby. No cooking may be done except on park or camp stoves. There are five parking areas, as well as scattered small areas, to accommodate visitors. Water hydrants and drinking fountains can be found throughout. Four large picnic shelters are located within the park for the convenience of our visitors. Fire wood is available upon request from Park Attendants.

Restaurant/Concession/Lodging — A new restaurant and concession is now open overlooking the beautiful and scenic Ohio River. Seating is available to approximately 100 people, both inside and outside. Fresh Ohio River catfish dinners are a specialty, as well as a variety of sandwiches and steaks. Facilities are also available for private parties. This building also houses the office for the Cave-In-Rock lodges, which are also located along the riverfront. For reservations, call 618/289-4545.

Camping — The campground, located on the scenic north side of the park, has camping facilities available for both mobile units and tents. Thirty-five Class B sites, which are equipped with electricity and will accommodate units up to 35-feet long, are available. Class C tent sites in the same area have a very scenic, secluded woodland setting. Water and toilet facilities are present for both areas. A trailer dumping station is also available. Contact the Site Superintendent or campground attendant for camping permits and information.



FACILITIES

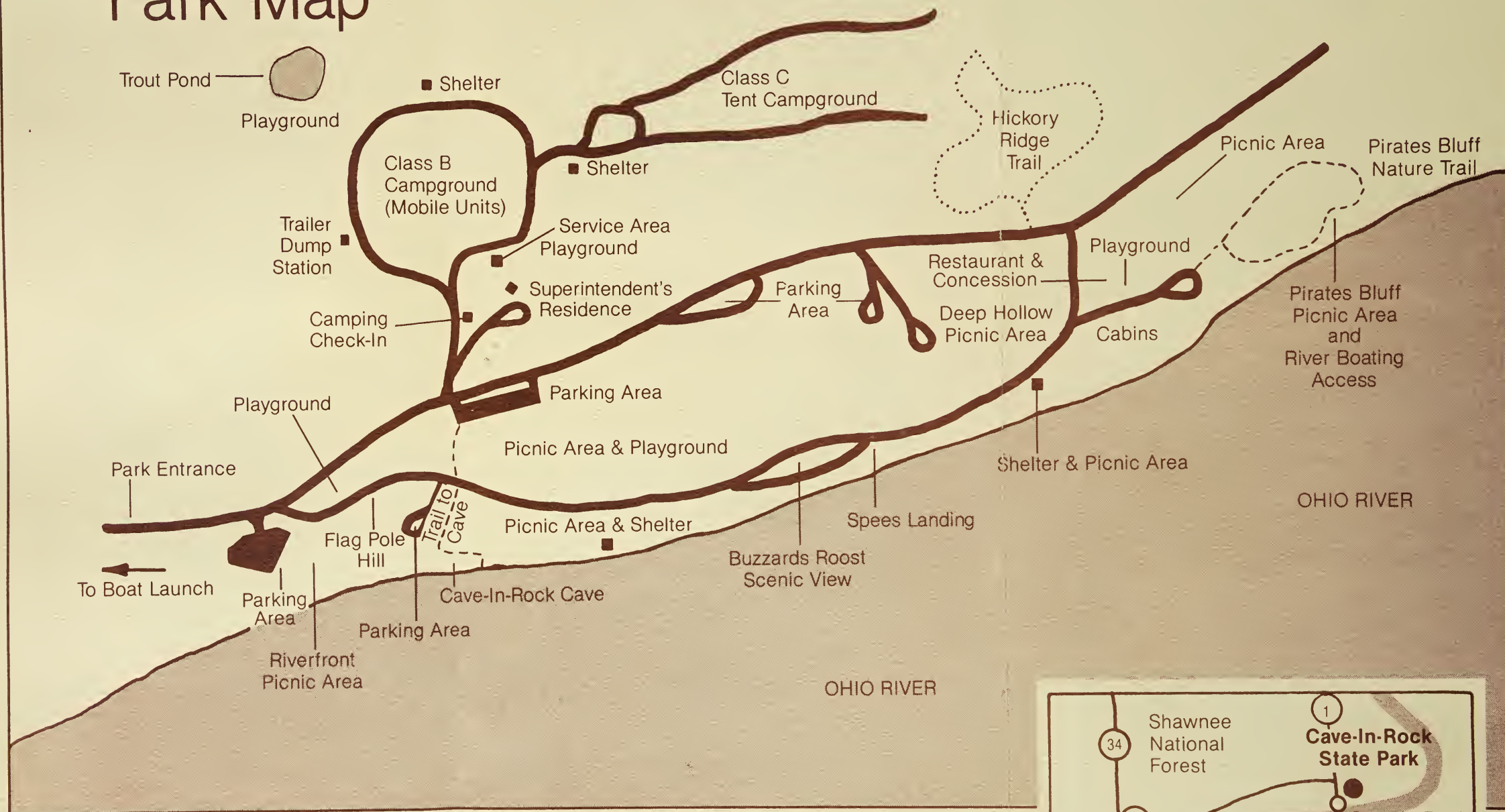
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Park Map





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